DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 403 059 PS 024 974

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TITLE Conditions for Appropriate Pedagogical Organizing and Performing of Play in the Preschool Institutions in Macedonia.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 9p.; In: "Childhood Education: International Perspectives," see PS 024 960.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Facilities; Educational Quality; *Educational Resources; Foreign Countries; *Play; *Preschool Education; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Macedonia; *Play Materials

ABSTRACT

Play is an activity of basic importance for the development of children of preschool age. This research project examined the organization and use of play in preschool institutions in Macedonia, operating with a main hypothesis that there is an absence of optimal conditions for play in these preschools. Subjects were 28 preschools and 70 teachers; research methods included analysis of pedagogical documents, a questionnaire, and observation. Results revealed that although teachers have a positive attitude toward play and it is accorded appropriate importance in the country's educational program, actual material conditions are inadequate. Problems exist with the space, equipment, toys, and didactic materials necessary for the appropriate organizing and performing of play. Teachers' enthusiasm for modern approaches to the organization of play is undermined by the unsatisfactory condition of the material environment. (EV)

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CONDITIONS FOR APPROPRIATE PEDAGOGICAL ORGANIZING AND PERFORMING OF PLAY IN THE PRESCHOOL INSTITUTIONS IN MACEDONIA

ED 403 059

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Introduction

The theme of this research is play and its pedagogical organizing and performing in the preschool institutions. The research comprised 28 educational groups (medium and large) and 70 preschool teachers from several preschool institutions in Skopje and its neighbourhood. The results obtained from the research proved the hypothesis that in Skopje and its neighbourhood there is an absence of optimal conditions for appropriate organizing and performing of children's play. This particularly refers to the spatial requirements, toys, means and didactic material as a condition for appropriate pedagogical organizing and performing of play and play activities.

Play is an activity of basic importance for the development of children of preschool age. Much has been written about play, many researches have been conducted but we haven't been able to define the phenomenon of children's play yet.

In the preschool period play occupies all the personality of the children and presents an inexhaustible source of new knowledge. Play is a space created by the child offering him thorough realization. Play offers a possibility where the child can surpass himself and cross the borders of his own experience.

In the modern environments of life play becomes even more important. Fast and dynamic life is one of the reasons why employed parents dedicate less time to their children. Usual human communication is being reduced to one-track communication, mainly through the mass media. In such condi-

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tions play loses its basic features. "It becomes programmed, the green monitor supersedes the green fields, cartoon heroes, friends, even parents have been replaced by hourly paid people. (Zbornik, 1991) " No one considers play as important and as the most accessible source of the culture, through which a link to living and passed generations is established."

In circumstances when the parental home is too small for play, children's play grounds poorly equipped and maintained, it seems that the preschool institution remains the only place for appropriate organizing and performing of play and play activities. But what really are the existing conditions there?

The necessity for this research came from the situation in the preschool institutions today. The research was diagnostical and revealed the modes the whole education work was conducted in the preschool institutions.

Aim and tasks of the study

The theme of this research was play and play activities of preschool children and conditions for their appropriate, pedagogical organizing and performing in the education process in the preschool institutions. The primary aim of this research was to examine play and conditions for its appropriate pedagogical organizing and performing in preschool institutions.

According to the aim defined, the tasks of the research were the following:

1. To examine the treatment of play and play activities of the preschool child in the actual educational programme;
2. To study the norms and standards of play organizing and performing in the preschool institutions;
3. To examine the attitudes and opinions of preschool teachers regarding children's play and conditions for its appropriate organizing and performing in the pre-school institutions;
4. To define objective conditions for performing children's play directly through the educational process.

Fulfilling of these tasks should lead us to information revealing other links, interrelations and relationships among the categories examined.

General Hypothesis

There is an absence of optimal conditions for the appropriate organizing and performing of children's play in the preschool institutions.

Accessory Hypothesis

1. The preschool educational programme gives a dominant importance to play and its role in the development and education of the preschool child;
2. Pedagogical standards and norms are compliant with development needs of the preschool child as well as with minimal requirements of the appropriate organizing and performing of children's play;
3. Majority of the preschool teachers have a positive attitude towards the role of play in the development of the preschool child;
4. Preschool teachers assess conditions for play in their preschool institution as unsatisfactory;
5. Material conditions (space and equipment), toys, means and didactic materials are unsatisfactory for the appropriate organizing and performing of children's play in the preschool institutions;
6. The organization of preschool play in the preschool institutions is in discrepancy with the contemporary needs and interests of the preschool child.

Design of the study

Various samples were necessary for this research (a sample of preschool institutions, a sample of educational groups and a sample of preschool teachers).

The sample of preschool institutions N= (28) was randomly stratified which means that four preschool institutions were randomly chosen from groups with different development level.

Samples chosen comply with the aims, tasks, hypothesis and character of this research. The sample structure shows that all relevant categories of the population of preschool teachers were included.

The research sample equals to 19.3 % N= (70) of the total population of the pre-school teachers in the preschool institutions in Skopje and its neighbourhood.

This research had, from a methodological point of view, a descriptive character. Having in mind the theme and the aim of the research, and in order to obtain relevant data, following research techniques were applied in this research:

1. Analysis of the pedagogical documentation,
2. Questionnaires,

3. Scaling and

4. Systematic monitoring

Instruments:

1. Memo pad for contents analysis of the educational activities programme in preschool education,

2. Record for written evidence of activities (free activities and directed activities record) and

3. Questionnaire - scale for the preschool teachers.

The results

I

A general conclusion from the analysis of the educational programme in preschool education is that play and play activities are given the appropriate treatment, role and meaning regarding development and education of preschool children. It is obvious in emphasizing the role of play in the intellectual, moral, aesthetic and physical development of the preschool child.

As we know, play is important for cognitive abilities of children. The child enriches its own speech through play and in a specific way becomes familiar with the immediate social and natural environment. The child also develops its moral features - persistence, independence, initiative. (Nporpama, 1982). Play has its role in aesthetic education. In the process of play the child strengthens its body and health and improves its motoriy abilities.

Analysis of the types of play and play activities included in the programme (creative, constructive, motory, didactic) and the large number of aims and tasks to be met, once more confirms the development possibilities of these activities which are of great importance in the correct development and education of the children in the preschool age. All this absolutely confirms the hypothesis for the dominant importance given to play and play activities in the actual programme and its role in the development and education of children in the preschool institutions.

II

The analysis of norms and standards for space and equipment, toys, means, and educational materials in the educational work with chiidren of preschool age showed the important role given to the psycho-physical development of children besides fulfilling the programme's aims and tasks. However, it is a disturbing fact that these are minimal norms and standards, i. e. the low level of equipment in the preschool institutions, which level has not been respected for a long time now. The actual minimal norms and standards offer a satisfactory level in carrying out the educational work in the preschool institutions. Another question is what, in fact, minimal norm means from the aspect of quantity. This definition of minimal norms and standards is questionable by itself (Hopmatnbn, 1987) We should endeavour to establish normal, optimal norms and standards, regardless of the social circumstances and actual situation of education. This actual structure is wrong, it blunts the criteria and leaves negative consequences to the youngest generation.

III

The data obtained from the systematic monitoring of free and directed activities confirmed our hypothesis of unsatisfactory material conditions (space and equipment), toys, means and didactic materials for appropriate organizing and performing children's play in the preschool institutions. It particularly becomes obvious from the records of free activities regarding the quantity of toys used where only in 25 % of cases there is a toy for each child. The data for equipment of play-comers in the room for daily activities also prove the hypothesis. The results obtained from the systematic monitoring of the free and directed activities thoroughly confirmed the hypothesis that the organization of play and play activities in the preschool institutions is in discrepancy with the contemporary needs and interests of the preschool child. The organization, forms, methods and especially means used in free and directed activities thoroughly confirmed it. It should be pointed out that extremely favourable results were obtained regarding the preschool teachers, their communication with the children, support of children's initiative, maintenance of discipline in the group and treatment of children.

This proves that the appropriate organizing and performing of play according to the modern needs and interests of the preschool child depends besides on the preschool teacher, also on material conditions. Regardless of the teacher's strong enthusiasm and will for modern work according to widely accepted standards, the preschool teacher is thwarted at the very beginning. All this shows that unless the actual conditions of work in the preschool institutions change soon in the sense of their improvement according to the modern needs of the child, the situation of the existing gap

masked with the teacher's enthusiasm will be worsened at the expence of the children's development and creativity.

IV

The results from the conducted poll of the teachers confirmed the hypothesis of teachers' opinions and attitudes regarding play and play activities. The hypothesis that the majority of the pre-school teachers have a positive attitude towards importance of play of the preschool child was completely confirmed. This is obvious by the fact that 94.28 % of the preschool teachers see play as important in the development of all components of the personality of the child, i. e. play has the chief importance in the complete development of the pre-school child.

Similarly, 68.57 % of the preschool teachers believe that play has the greatest importance in the development and education of the preschool child, 66.72 % stated that through play they regularly achieved better results and 75.71 % used play in all educational segments equally.

The results from the poll confirmed the hypothesis that "pre-school teachers assess the playing conditions in their preschool institution as unsatisfactory." The most frequent were the answers where teachers stated the lack of toys, means and didactic material, spatial conditions and number of children in the group as reasons for the absence of play in the preschool institution.

Only 17.14 % of all preschool teachers state that quantity of toys, means and didactic materials is excellent and 28.57 % see it as good. Professional and organizational conditions for organizing and performing of play were assessed as excellent by 37.15 % of the teachers. It is interesting that the hypothesis regarding spatial conditions for organizing and performing of play was not completely confirmed since 62.86 % see spatial requirements of the room for daily activities completely met and 54.29 % use the yard of the preschool institution. These data are contradictory. Namely, 44.28 % of the preschool teachers see the spatial conditions as one of the main reasons for the unsatisfactory application of play in the educational process, 32.86 % see the number of children in the group as one of the main reasons for the unsatisfactory application of play in the educational process. Likewise, numerous are the teachers who insist on reduction of the number of children in the group in favour of the spatial conditions.

Conclusions

As a result of this research, several conclusions which are representative could be drawn from the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data obtained. In this view, the most important are the following conclusions:

1. In the preschool institutions in Skopje and its neighbourhood there are no optimal conditions for appropriate pedagogical organizing and performing of children's play. This particularly applies to spatial conditions as well as toys, means and didactic material as requirements for appropriate pedagogical organizing and performing of children's play and play activities.

2. In the educational programme for preschool education play and play activities have the correct treatment the role and meaning regarding the development and education of pre-school children which is obvious in emphasizing the role of play in the intellectual, moral, aesthetic and physical development of the pre-school child as well as in the different types of play and play activities included in the programme (creative, motory, didactic).

3. The actual norms and standards, space, equipment, toys, means and didactic materials comply with the requirements for psycho-physical development of the child as well as with the minimal requirements for appropriate organizing and performing of play and play activities in the educational process. The minimal norms and standards which are not respected in practice, offer satisfactory level of conducting educational work in the preschool institutions.

4. The majority of the preschool teachers have a positive attitude towards the importance of play in the development of the preschool child. Their attitude is seen in the importance they give to play in the complete development of the child's personality, effects of the application of play in the directed activities and the role of play in the development of all components of the child's personality.

5. The preschool teachers see the playing conditions in their preschool institutions as unsatisfactory. This primarily applies to the spatial conditions, the number of children in the group as well as the quantity of toys, means and didactic materials.

6. The material conditions, space, equipment and toys, means and didactic materials necessary for appropriate organizing and performing of children's play are unsatisfactory in the preschool institutions. This particularly applies to the organization and performing of the play in free and directed activities.

7. Organization of play in the preschool institutions is discrepant with the contemporary needs and interests of the preschool child regarding the application of the forms and methods as well as regarding the means used in play organization for the free and directed activities.

This research examined play only from the aspect of its appropriate pedagogical organizing and performing in the pre-school institutions. Numerous are the problems in direct connection with play and play activities which in our circumstances haven't been at all or have been a little studied and examined.

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